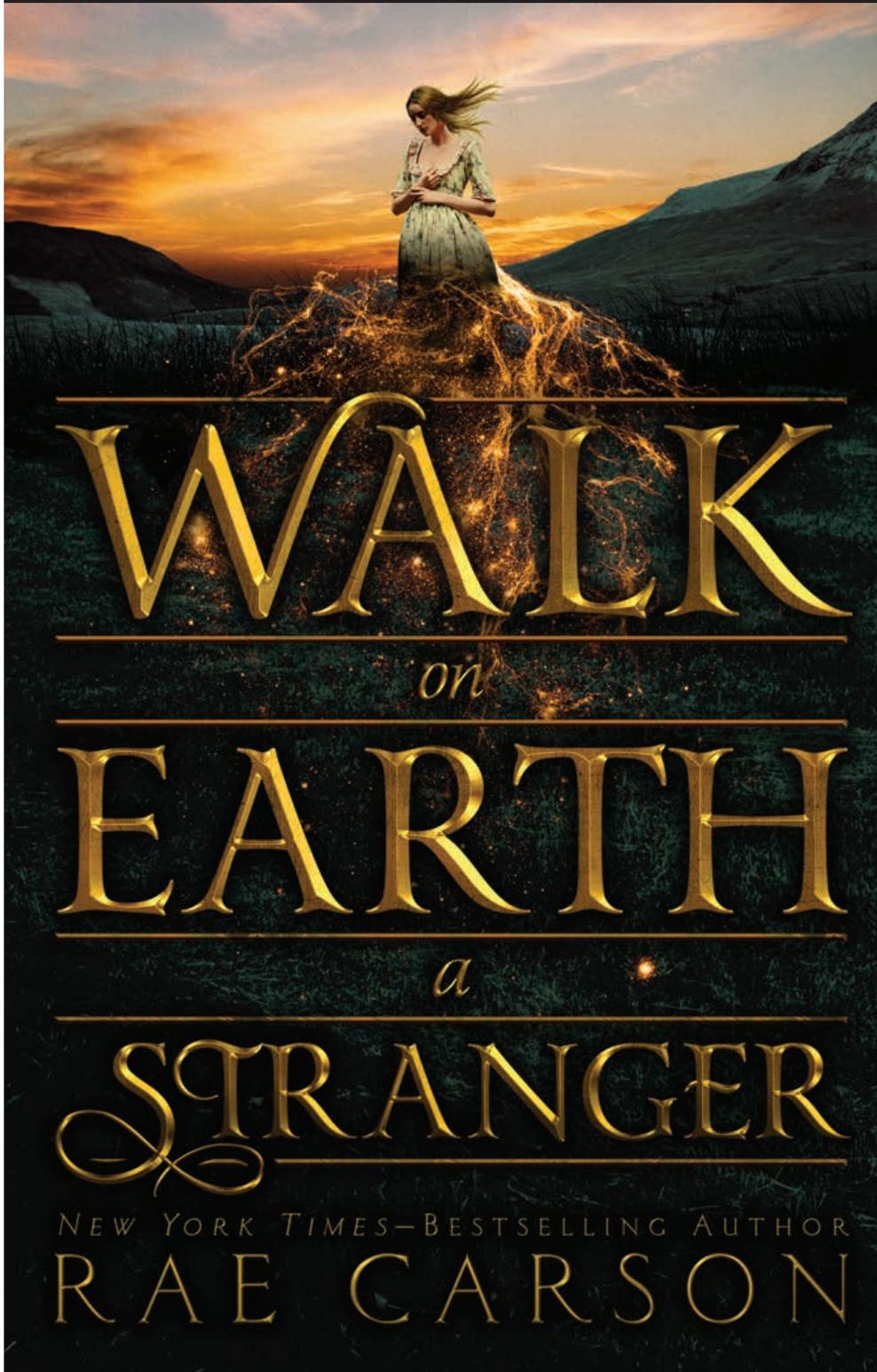


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



Aligns with Common Core State Standards for grades 9–12

# ABOUT THE BOOK

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Lee Westfall has a secret. She can sense the presence of gold in the world around her. Veins deep beneath the earth, pebbles in the river, nuggets dug up from the forest floor. The buzz of gold means warmth and life and home—until everything is ripped away by a man who wants to control her. Left with nothing, Lee disguises herself as a boy and takes to the trail across the country. Gold was discovered in California, and where else could such a magical girl find herself, find safety?

A 2015 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD LONGLIST TITLE

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the setting at the beginning of the story. How does the setting change as the story moves forward? Discuss the role it plays. How does the setting, for example, build suspense? How does it speak to the travelers' courage? Their dreams? Identify words or phrases from the text that help situate the story in time.

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 5*

2. Discuss Lee's relationship with her parents. What role does she play at home? What ability does she have that concerns her mother? Why does her mother worry?

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 3*

3. Describe Lee's relationship with Jefferson and analyze how their relationship evolves over time. What events in the story impact their relationship? At the end of the story, what does the reader know about their relationship? Why do you think the author is not more specific about their future?

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 3*

4. Why does Lee not go with Jefferson when he asks her to accompany him out west? What tragic event happens and how does it impact Lee's decision to set out after Jefferson? Where does she find Jefferson and how does he react to seeing her?

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1*

5. Lee disguises herself as a boy and takes on male responsibilities when she joins the wagon train. Why does Lee disguise herself? How is she accepted once other members of the wagon train learn she is a woman?

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1*

6. Characterize Lee's uncle. Why does he want Lee to live with him? Why is Lee afraid of him? Is her fear warranted? Why or why not? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 3*
7. Compare and contrast Mrs. Joyner's attitude toward Lee at the beginning of their journey with her attitude toward Lee at the end. What events happen throughout the journey to contribute to her change of heart? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 3*
8. When the wagon train sets out, the members do not know one another. However, events along the way challenge them to work together to survive. The manner in which the individuals react to these challenges defines their character. Identify any one challenge and describe how any single individual or group responded to it. What does the response reveal about character? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 3*
9. Both Lee and Jefferson travel under false identities. However, when they stop along their journey, both carve their real names into a rock. What does this scene reveal about both of them? What themes does this scene develop in the story? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1, 2*
10. The trip across the desert and through the mountains is grueling and dangerous. In what ways are the travelers prepared for the journey? In what ways are they not? Discuss two or three of the biggest challenges the group faces and describe how the travelers respond to them. How does the Major's injury impact the travelers? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1*
11. Once the survivors reach California, Lee encounters her uncle, who attempts to take her away from the wagon train. Describe how the members of the wagon train come to her aid. What does their behavior say about her relationship with them? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1*
12. Lee Westfall is a strong character, both before she takes the journey out west and during the trip. What evidence from the story supports this statement? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-12.1*

## FURTHER READING SUGGESTIONS

- Bios, Joan W. *Letters from the Corrugated Castle: A Novel of Gold Rush California, 1850–1852*. New York: Atheneum, 2007.
- Cadnum, Michael. *Blood Gold*. New York: Viking, 2014.
- Gist, Deeanne. *The Measure of a Lady*. New York: Bethany House, 2006.
- Hobbs, Will. *Jason's Gold*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Ketchum, Liza. *Newsgirl*. New York: Viking, 2009.
- Lee, Stacy. *Under a Painted Sky*. New York: G.P. Putnam, 2015.
- Volmer, Mary. *Crown of Dust*. New York: Soho, 2010.
- Wood, Frances. *Daughter of Madrugada*. New York: Delacorte, 2002.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rae Carson is the author of the *New York Times*–bestselling *Girl of Fire and Thorns* series. Her debut novel, *The Girl of Fire and Thorns*, was named a Morris YA Debut Award finalist, an Andre Norton Award finalist, a YALSA Top Ten Best Fiction for Teens Pick, and received two starred reviews. Her books tend to contain adventure, magic, and smart girls who make (mostly) smart choices. Originally from California, Rae Carson now lives in Arizona with her husband.



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